

English MA Course Descriptions

2020 FALL

ENGL 701: Seminar in Graduate Methodology

Prof. Annmarie Drury

Class code 34520

Tuesdays 4:40–6:30pm

What does literary scholarship in graduate school look like? When your graduate instructors ask you to write a research paper, what do they mean? In this course, we practice methods in research and writing that will be valuable in all your graduate classes. As we work, we'll create a reflective practice by thinking together about how knowledge is created in the discipline of "English": what kinds of questions generate knowledge, and what values inform those questions? By examining the work of others—of established scholars outside our course and of one another—we collect a toolkit of thinking, reading, writing, and research strategies. We give special attention to the academic essay as a flexible, sophisticated form that affords space for creativity. We aim to develop a new sense of our own proclivities as literary scholars and a new competence in pursuing our interests: to leave the course knowing which strategies for reading, posing questions, and researching each of us finds most engaging and knowing how to research and write in ways convincing to fellow scholars. Literary texts will include Margaret Oliphant's *Library Window* and poems by Christina Rossetti, among others.

ENGL 636: History of Literary Criticism

Prof. Jeff Cassvan

Class code 34517

Wednesdays 4:40–6:30pm

This course provides a thorough introduction to the main concerns and developments of literary criticism and literary theory. We will begin with a careful reading of a few texts by Plato and Aristotle and then turn to a consideration of the diverse perspectives on literature (including Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Formalism, Structuralism, Semiotics, Poststructuralism, Deconstruction, New Historicism, Gender Studies and Queer Theory) that have emerged during the twentieth century. The most stimulating and far reaching theoretical insights very often arise out of reading encounters: Derrida's careful readings of Plato and Rousseau, Lacan's reading of Freud, Freud's own reading of literature and of the German language, Althusser's reading of Marx, Butler's reading of Derrida's reading of Austin, to cite a number of important examples. Accordingly, we will treat the texts of

critics and theorists as primary and will attend throughout the semester to the fallout of what Paul de Man has described as literary theory's "necessarily pragmatic moment...that adds a subversive element of unpredictability and makes it something of a wild card in the serious game of the theoretical disciplines." While we will make use of the introductory materials and organizational format provided in the second edition of *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, we will resist and question the tendency to produce or rely upon simple summaries and paraphrases of difficult arguments and points of view, and our class sessions will be devoted to reading encounters with very specific pages and paragraphs in the assigned works. These primary critical and theoretical texts will often be supplemented with a wide range of literary materials (poems, short stories, essays, translations) made available on Blackboard.

ENGL 681: Special Studies

The Gothic Child

Prof. Veronica Schanoes

Class code 34519

Thursdays 4:40–6:30pm

Our contemporary ideal of childhood is that it should be a carefree time of innocence and wonder. But from the late twentieth century to the current day, the place of the gothic in children's literature—the grim, the undead, the ghostly—has only grown stronger. In this class, we'll survey middle-grade gothic/horror fiction directed at middle-graders to see what meaning gothic forms, themes, and topics hold in the context of contemporary childhoods, and in turn, what the significance of childhood—child characters and child readers—is to these juvenile gothic novels. How is the relatively powerless situation of children reflected in these tales of shadowy, evil, supernatural forces conspiring; crumbling, labyrinthine old houses with unexplored recesses; ghostly revenants bringing the past into the present; and ancient family secrets that bring curses unto the present generation? How do child-characters navigate this world of dark magic, mortal peril, and terror? Texts may include Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, Frances Hardinge's *Cuckoo Song*, Lemony Snicket's *The Bad Beginning*, India Hill Brown's *The Forgotten Girl*, Lindsay Barracough's *Long Lankin*, and Joseph Bruchac's *Skeleton Man*, among others. We will read these texts with the assistance of important critical works on the gothic, such as Sigmund Freud's "The Uncanny," readings from Jerrold E. Hogle and Robert Miles's *The Gothic and Theory*, and Chloé Germaine Buckley's *Twenty-First-Century Children's Gothic*.

ENGL 719: Studies in Medieval Literature

Violence in the Middle Ages

Prof. Edward Currie

Class code 34524

Mondays 4:40–6:30pm

Medieval literature is often thought to reflect an era of massive bloodshed. But what did “violence” mean in the literature of the period? As we read depictions of conflict in Old English poems, Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, and Icelandic sagas, we shall analyze and interpret how medieval authors represent violent deeds that have deep historical, literary, and cultural meanings. Some questions we will try to answer include: Was violence always thought of in moralistic terms? How is violence tied to the representation of individualistic heroes and heroines? How can violence promote group identity, and shape and reflect gender roles? Our investigations of depictions of quarrels will shed light on the divergent ways authors imagined violence, which can be wholly alien to modern meanings of the word.

The readings will probably include the *Dream of the Rood*, *The Battle of Maldon*, *Judith*, Chaucer’s “The Knight’s Tale,” “The Miller’s Tale,” “The Wife of Bath’s Tale and Prologue,” *Egil’s Saga*, *Gisli Sursson’s Saga*, *Njáls Saga*, and texts from the *Poetic Edda*. The literature will be read in translation, except for certain Middle English texts which will be read in the original language. We will also read theoretical scholarship on medieval violence. Students will turn in brief weekly responses to the literature, and give one short oral presentation on an assigned text. Students will also write a final research paper.

ENGL 722: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature

The Eighteenth-Century British Novel

Prof. Ala Alryyes

Class code 34525

Mondays 6:40–8:30pm

The eighteenth century, the age of Enlightenment, saw the development of the discourse of individual as well as human rights. It also witnessed the rise of the English novel, a new type of literary production that influenced and was influenced by the language of rights. We will study a set of excellent and influential eighteenth-century novels and reflect on their importance in their time and their afterlives in ours. Our course will emphasize the importance of close reading and historical context. Topics of the course include the rise of the novel and the culture of experience; realism and allegory; the portrayal of selfhood; the novel’s orchestration of time and space; the novel’s stylistic “lawlessness” and its vexed relation to its generic predecessors—to pre-novelistic (such as the epic and the romance) and extra-literary discourses (such as newspapers and conduct books) that the novel

adapted or parodied; the novel's connections with popular culture; its political, often revolutionary, representations of gender, privacy, and the body; the novel's influence on the public sphere; the Comic; the novel's universalism and its relation to the Enlightenment; the novel's representation of slavery and the colonial experience. Readings in theory and secondary literature as well.

ENGL 727: Studies in American Literature, 1820–1920

What's American about American Literature?

Prof. Karen Weingarten

Class code 34526

Tuesdays 4:40–6:30pm

Is the category of the “American” in crisis? Or perhaps a better question might be, was there ever a time that it wasn’t? By reading well-known American writers from Nathaniel Hawthorne to Edith Wharton alongside less recognized authors like Frances Harper and Edith Eaton (also known as Sin Sui Far), this course will interrogate the concept of the “American” as it defines a literary tradition starting in the nineteenth century. We’ll ask whether we should continue to group literature along national lines, or whether there may be more productive or interesting ways to read today. We’ll also read literary criticism by critics who have addressed the big questions of the American canon, starting in the 1970s and to this day, to examine how the category of “American literature” has changed—and why. And we’ll end by considering where it might be going next. Students in this course will ultimately consider not only the question “what’s American about American literature?” but why we should read something called American literature at all.

ENGL 781-01: Special Seminar

Studies in Italian American Literature

Prof. Fred Gardaphe

Class code 34591

Wednesdays 6:40–8:30pm

This course examines the literary contributions of Italian Americans from the early twentieth century to the present. The narratives of one of the largest European-descended immigrant groups are those of diaspora, a wrenching away from the homeland that still resonates in Italian America’s most recent literature. Migration, settlement patterns, linguistic hybridity, ethnic/racial consciousness, conflicts between marginal and mainstream cultures, and gender ideology will be some of the topics germane to the literature under consideration. Novelists discussed include Pietro di Donato, John Fante, Tina DeRosa, Gilbert Sorrentino, Carol Maso, and Don DeLillo, among poets, short fiction

and critical writers. The development of secondary criticism and its reflections on Italian American literature is instrumental in defining a canon of texts central to a cultural group. Thus, second-order reflections will be read alongside primary texts in order to examine the strategies taken to offer “protocols of reading,” compelling intertextual analysis.

ENGL 781-02: Special Seminar
21st-Century Asian American Literatures
Prof. Caroline Hong
Class code 34593
Thursdays 4:40–6:30pm

The term “Asian America” has been and continues to be used by writers, readers, and scholars of Asian American literature. But where or what or who is Asian America? As a construct, it encompasses diverse, and even contested, visions of identity, culture, and community. In this course, we will read twenty-first-century Asian American literary works to explore the most contemporary of these visions, which demonstrate the “heterogeneity, hybridity, multiplicity” of Asian America, to use Lisa Lowe’s influential formulation. We will frame our readings with recent theory and criticism from the field of Asian American studies and within/alongside their historical, political, social, cultural, and economic contexts, focusing on issues of gender, sexuality, class, disability, trauma, citizenship, imperialism, globalization, etc., in addition to race and racism. Writers we might read include Gina Apostol, Thi Bui, Elaine Castillo, Alexander Chee, Cathy Park Hong, Mira Jacob, Gish Jen, Lisa Ko, Min Jin Lee, Ling Ma, H. M. Naqvi, Celeste Ng, Ruth Ozeki, Rakesh Satyal, Lysley Tenorio, Kai Cheng Thom, Jia Tolentino, Monique Truong, Ocean Vuong, and Esmé Weijun Wang.

ENGL 781-03: Special Seminar
Protest Prose: Political Nonfiction in the 21st-Century US
Prof. Briallen Hopper
Class code 34595
Thursdays 6:40–8:30pm

In the era of Occupy, Black Lives Matter, Me Too, and Abolish ICE, creative nonfiction has been one of many modes of powerful protest. This course focuses on modern classics and experiments in nonfiction protest in the US, including writing published in critically acclaimed books or on controversial websites. We will read work by writers such as Seo-Young Chu, Tressie McMillan Cottom, Roxane Gay, Laila Lalami, Kiese Laymon, Valeria Luiselli, and Chanel Miller, and students will have the opportunity to write in both analytical and creative modes.

ENGL 781-04: Special Seminar

Theory in the Flesh: Chicana/Latina Feminisms

Prof. Vanessa Pérez-Rosario

Class code 34597

Tuesdays 6:40–8:30pm

Latina feminist writing has for decades provided critical concepts to innovate and transform feminist theory in the United States and beyond. This semester we will examine key writers beginning from the 1980s to the present whose work has intervened in the field of feminist theory, although their contributions to the field are not always recognized. In the 1970s and 1980s, women of color were in the process of defining themselves, asserting their agency, and building their own intellectual traditions. The publication of Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) and Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith's *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave* (1982) set out to expand the definition of feminist to make this analysis relevant to women of color in the United States. These texts sought a signifier, a self-representation that would underscore women's multiple subjectivities of race, class, sexuality, and gender, generating a theoretical space to critique sexism, homophobia, a gendered analysis of history, politics, institutionalized racism and economic exploitation. Out of their subordination as Latinas and their exclusion from both the male-dominated ethnic studies movements and the white-dominated women's movements, Chicanas and Latinas sought to create spaces to articulate a feminist consciousness as members of diverse national groups, and as pan-ethnic Latinas, while also articulating political solidarity between Third World women in the United States and women activists south of the border. In this class, we will look specifically at Latina and Chicana writers whose writings, essays, poetry and theatre are the foundation of Latina feminist theoretical interventions. We will then look at 21st-century Latinas who continue to redefine and reimagine Latina feminisms today.

ENGL 791: Thesis Course and ENGL 795: Independent Study

Department permission required. Please email Prof. Caroline Hong (caroline.hong@qc.cuny.edu), the Director of Graduate Studies in English, if you wish to enroll in these courses.